

IQRA Approach

Bismillah, Alhamdulillah Was Salaatu Was Salam Ala Rasulullah

Learning is a lifelong journey. As Muslims, we are taught to be active learners throughout our life, NEVER stopping. Especially since “Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim”. And “Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him”. And importantly, Allah has told that He “will elevate those of you who are faithful, and ‘raise’ those gifted with knowledge in rank.” Moreover, we learn that “The world is cursed. What is in it is cursed, except for remembrance of Allah, what is conducive to that, the knowledgeable person and the learning person.” In fact, beneficial knowledge is an investment which continues to benefit even after we have died, since, “When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son, who prays for him (for the deceased).” In fact, “There is no one who goes out of his house in order to seek knowledge, but the angels lower their wings in approval of his action. And *people do not gather in the houses of Allah, reciting the book of Allah and studying it together, but that tranquillity will descend upon them, mercy will cover them, angels will surround them, and Allah will mention them to those near him. And let's not forget* “The scholars are the successors of the prophets. Verily, the prophets do not pass on gold and silver coins, but rather they only impart knowledge.” And also, seeking knowledge is ALSO a way to Allah, an act of ibadah, if it is halal obviously, and helps us draw closer to Allah by understanding his creation, i.e. the world around us, through contemplation, and we only reinforce its loftiness by intending to empower ourselves with the knowledge we learn since, “A strong believer is better and is more lovable to Allah than a weak believer”, and when we learn and grow more to connect better with Allah, serve the ummah further and excelling over the kuffar in terms of wealth, health and influence. Strength is in different forms, and when we are strong with our minds, through knowledge and learning, we become stronger than those who lack such knowledge and skills. And especially with the myriad of learning techniques developed by philosophers, psychologists, thinkers and educators, it may seem a bit perplexing to identify the best and most fulfilling of ways to pursue learning. After all, it's not a stop, but a journey. We as Muslims, learn and thus advance until we meet Allah. Despite the rapid scientific progression, profound philosophical inquiries, it is always liable to change or refinement and NOT the final truth. Simply looking at the history of relatively modern concepts in medicine, astronomy and political models display that. But what doesn't “advance”, simply because it is already the most advanced and highest of systems to follow is Islam. Everything that we Humans produce or observe, be it a science, math or art, is SUBJECT to this Ultimate Submission. The Qur'an and Sunnah is what we used to judge reality, it is not the other way around, for our observation of the reality is flawed UNTIL and UNLESS it is consistent with the reality that Allah speaks, for He is Al Haqq and nothing can be false from him. So if logic, reason or science can align with the Message of Al Haqq, then we deem it to be pure and valid, else it is simply rejected. Stemming from this principle, I decided to look for what My Lord has advised whether in the Qur'an or through the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu alayhi wasallam, with regards to how to learn the best way. And as I laid out before, this would be the superior ground since everything else, if it is true, for example in science or reason, submits to the Islamic approach, as it is from Al-aleem, the all-knowing one, and al-hakeem The most Wise.

Please note, that this structural methodology, even though it is based on the Quran and Sunnah, is something I have just developed and is not from any islamic scholar, as of my knowledge. The reason I chose the name “Iqra” was for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it was the first word of the Noble Qur'an revealed to Rasulullah Sallallahu alayhi wasallam. This reflects some kind of significance in it, especially when it literally translates to “Read” and continues.. “In the name of your Lord who created-”. This itself underscores the importance of Reading, or connoting the very act of seeking knowledge. This was a clear call for him to become educated. And it is primarily through reading that we learn and educate ourselves. When “Iqra” was said to the illiterate Prophet, upon him be peace, who later on became one of the esteemed depiction of a man of wisdom and knowledge, it only reminds us to Read, both literally and figuratively, however possible for each of us.

Here's a mnemonic breakdown of ‘IQRA’. So, apart from the symbolic significance the term ‘Iqra’ carries, it

also has a methodological learning framework, each of which is firmly grounded and advocated by Qur'an and Sunnah. The I in IQRA stands for Intention or Niyyah, the Q is for Questioning, the R for Reflection and finally, the A for Application.

I- Intention

The intention or Niyyah is the first and foremost thing we're expected to have when completing any act of worship, or even something apparently unislamic in order to turn it into an ibadah and draw closer to Allah because "actions are judged by their intentions, and a man shall get what he intended" An intention refers to the intention or purpose behind an action. And our intention behind every action should be aligned with our very purpose of creation. Allah says "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me." Therefore, the intention of every ibaadah should definitely be to worship and please Allah alone, and the intention behind *learning*, of which is islamic, should definitely be to worship Allah alone, where the rest of the learning should preferably be to seek the Countenance of Allah. Therefore, if your intentions or motives for learning are inspired solely by wealth, fame or ego, then either purify it or quit. Seriously. Even arguing on a purely rational point of view, having an intention seeking Allah's pleasure, is the most consistent and persistent of all intentions. This kind of intention is NOT arbitrary, not bound to collapse at the slight turn or change of today's world, and is grounded in Divine Wisdom, and therefore is infallible. It is this kind of intention that offers unceasing hope and drive to keep going, in promise of an eternal reward, and greater, the Pleasure of Al-Azeem, The Magnificent One. Now, apart from my learning being blessed and a means of drawing closer to Allah, and an unbreakable driving force for me in my pursuit of knowledge, what else does intention cover? Well let's speak about intention in a linguistic sense now since we have pretty much covered its shariah meaning. This basically includes finding our approach to the specific set learning. A good strategy to use would be using the SMART goal setting technique. SMART goal setting is a framework for creating effective goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This approach helps ensure goals are well-defined, trackable, realistic, and aligned with overall objectives, increasing the likelihood of success.

Key elements of SMART goal setting:

- **Specific:** Goals should be clearly defined, unambiguous, and focused.
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- **Measurable:** It's crucial to establish criteria for measuring progress and determining when the goal is achieved.
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- **Achievable:** Goals should be realistic and attainable given available resources and skills.
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- **Relevant:** Goals should align with overall objectives and priorities.
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- **Time-bound:** Setting a deadline provides a sense of urgency and helps stay focused

SMART goal setting offers several advantages, primarily by improving focus, motivation, and the ability to track progress towards objectives. These benefits extend to personal and professional development, leading to increased clarity, efficiency, and a higher chance of achieving desired outcomes.

In fact, Abu Abdur Rahman reported: The companions would learn to recite ten verses from the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him. They would not take another ten verses until they understood the knowledge and deeds they contained. They would say, "We learned sacred knowledge and action together." The fact that they only learnt 10 verses at a time, and that they had objectives of how they would apply learnt knowledge, already shows a form of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals set by them.

So the first and foremost step to learning anything, our I in IQRA, Intention, should be a combination of both shariah-based-niyyah and linguistic-sense-intention. This is important and now that this is done, let's move on to the next step.

Q- Questioning

Now to question, we need our learning material, whatever way shape or form it is. It can be a book, video, lecture, newspaper, article, friend, whatever, but there must be a resource because where else are you going to extract information to even begin with. So this is a default requirement. Now that we have something to learn **from**, we must begin the questioning stage. There are 2 forms of learning, active and passive. When we simply read the text without *engaging* with it, chances are it's going to be lost from ourselves and this is what we call as passive learning. However active learning requires you to essentially FORCE that knowledge accumulated to more engagement and interaction. This way we don't forget what we learn. And, questioning fosters deeper engagement in learning by stimulating critical thinking, encouraging active discussion, and prompting students to connect new information to existing knowledge. It also helps students clarify their understanding, identify knowledge gaps, and develop confidence in their abilities. In fact socratic questioning reflects this brilliant approach. It is a method of learning through **questions, dialogue, and critical thinking**, rather than memorization or lectures. It comes from **Socrates**, the Greek philosopher, who believed the best way to understand something was to **question it deeply** until you reached the truth. Questions keep going until clarity is reached..

Now, is this even Islamically a part of learning? Yes. Allah commands us in the Qur'an, "And We sent not before you except men to whom We revealed [Our message]. So ask the people of the message if you do not know." Allah knows that asking is one way we get to know as knowers and it is commanded by Himself, then just reflect upon how important of a step this may be in learning. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, **"Verily, the only cure for ignorance is to ask questions."** Subhanallah! The ONLY cure for ignorance is to ask QUESTIONS. Because we won't question something we already know the answer to, so simply questioning shows and cures our ignorance, which is what we ideally want, as learners. Even in the Qur'an, the very inquisitive (curious but humble) nature of the sahabas are reflected when Allah addresses the Prophet (SAW) by clarifying "they ask you.." and then provides the answer. It is important to note here that our type of asking must be only out of ignorance and NOT of arrogance. For instance, when the angels asked Allah why he was going to place humankind on earth which seemingly would only do what the jinns did back then, i.e. cause destruction, this question was purely because they did not know the reason and were limited to their experiences and held no arrogance in their words. And accordingly Allah replied to them by stating how He knew what they didn't, which reflects how the reason behind His decision was to be clearly manifested in the righteous conduct and elite choices made by some of his Servants. But when Iblis arrogantly questioned Allah, why he should bow down to someone he views to be an inferior being, this is not for an objective of curing his ignorance, but rather to feel proud and superior than Adam (AS). Astaghfirullah. So when questioning reality and in learning, NEVER reflect arrogance but rather ignorance.

Talking about ignorance, Mujahid, a prominent Tabi' commented that **"The one who is shy or arrogant does not acquire the knowledge"**, so we shouldn't also refrain from asking because of these 2 destructive characteristics.

PS: As for shyness, known in Arabic as *Khajal*, it is mistakenly considered to be a virtue, and is mixed with *Hayaa'* (modesty) which is basically a positive virtue. Shyness can be considered a personality trait, which is fine as long as it does not stop the person from seeking knowledge and particularly from asking about their own mistakes and trying to correct them.

R- Reflection

Now this is a very important step in really connecting the acquired and learnt information to Allah (SWT). Reflecting or contemplating upon something just means engaging in deep reflective thought which should ideally help you derive a lesson from any given thing or experience and focusing on it, so as to gain a depth of understanding. It develops students' critical thinking skills by analysing experiences to improve future performance, greater student ownership of subject knowledge, improved meta-cognition, and more thorough comprehension of complex subject content.

“Do they not reflect within themselves: Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them two but with truth, and (for) an appointed term? And most surely most of the people are deniers of the meeting of their Lord.” (ar-Rum, 8)

“Say: I exhort you only to one thing, that rise up for Allah’s sake in twos and singly, then ponder: there is no madness in your companion; he is only a warner to you before a severe chastisement.” (as-Saba’, 46)

"Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?" "So relate the stories that perhaps they will give thought." (Al-A'raf 7:176)

"Thus Allah makes clear to you the signs that you might give thought." (Al-Baqarah 2:219)

"Then will you not use your reason?" (Yunus 10:16)

"And on the earth are signs for those who have Faith with certainty, And also in your own selves. Will you not then see?" [adh-Dhariyat 51:20-21].

Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?(Surah Muhammad 47:24)

In fact, The Blessed Prophet –upon him blessings and peace- loved silence and contemplation. In the times just prior to his prophethood, he had grown even a more intense desire to retreat. He would remain for days on end in the Cave of Hira, approximately around 5 kilometers away from Mecca. His worship in these times of retreat was comprised of contemplation, gazing at the Kabah and reflecting on the treasures of the heavens and earth in the footsteps of his great ancestor Ibrahim –upon him peace-.[5] Through this manner, the Almighty was preparing him for his sacred mission.

To reflect or ponder or contemplate, just look back at what you have learnt and essentially you want to use it as a means of getting closer to Allah directly, by appreciating his Names and Attributes through it, and internalizing wisdom so you can grow as an individual.

And the last step of our learning method is-

A- Application

This is the last and final stage of learning but is not something to get it done with and never return, because I have combined Revision/Practice with Application. This is key to fully benefiting from our learning and keeping in touch with it, to truly empower ourselves. Allah says: **"The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries books."**

(Qur'an, 62:5)

This criticises those who do not act upon any acquired knowledge. Knowledge without action is useless — just

heavy baggage. In fact, if the knowledge was not of benefit, this is something the Prophet SAW himself used to seek refuge in Allah from knowledge that did not benefit. ("O Allah, I seek refuge with You from knowledge that does not benefit.")

Psychology also confirms this truth:

♦ **Active learning > Passive learning**

- Studies show that "**active learning**" (where students apply, teach, reflect, and use knowledge) massively increases retention and understanding.
- Passive intake (just reading or listening without application) fades quickly from memory.
 - Experiential learning involves actively engaging in hands-on experiences and reflecting on them to enhance understanding and skill development.

This Application state can range from simply reviewing your notes every study session, teaching others this knowledge [The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it." which is Feynman's technique embedded essentially], working on projects that need you to actively recall this knowledge to actually live by acquired knowledge.

Alhamdulillah, I have hope. Hope that this exemplary philosophy of learning which I have formulated from the Quran, Sunnah and the way of the Salaf, beautifully embedded in a simple mnemonic, IQRA, that you all can easily remember and hopefully put into practice and spread our powerful Islamic tradition of learning. May Allah grant us success in this world and the hereafter and let our intelligence, wisdom and knowledge be a means of getting closer to Allah and strengthening our relationship with him.